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Crime

Alberta RCMP say court injunction allows law enforcement to immediately crack down on illegal public gatherings

Jeff Labine
May 07, 2021 • May 7, 2021 • 1 minute read • 112 Comments

The RCMP watch as parishioners arrive for Easter Sunday service at GraceLife Church in Parkland County on April 4, 2021. PHOTO BY DAVID BLOOM /Postmedia, file

A Court of Queen's Bench granted an injunction Thursday that allows law enforcement to act immediately to stop gatherings that are in defiance of public health orders without the need to have Alberta Health Services (AHS) in attendance, says Alberta's RCMP.

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AHS sought the pre-emptive injunction ahead of a planned protest by the operator of the Whistle Stop Cafe, who had been defying public health orders. AHS says the injunction defines the event as an illegal public gathering that does not comply with restrictions such as requiring masking, limiting gatherings and physical distancing.

In response to the injunction, RCMP issued a statement Friday saying the court ruling allows law enforcement to “act immediately” without having AHS in attendance.

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“There are a variety of ways to enforce this order, including the ability to issue tickets, fines and criminal charges to individuals who are breaking public health orders by organizing and/or attending these events,” the statement says.

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“This can include arrest and removal of any person who has notice of this order and chooses to act in violation of it. We all have a part to play in the provincial COVID-19 response. Our primary role is, and always will be, keeping all Albertans safe, while upholding the law. This includes enforcing public health orders for the health and safety of all Albertans.”

The statement follows several high-profile instances of months-long flagrant defiance of Alberta's health rules, including the cafe, which AHS physically closed on Wednesday after issuing a closure order in January, and Parkland County's GraceLife Church which was ordered closed in December but not shuttered until last month.

Both the RCMP and AHS previously deflected responsibility for shutting the church down to the other agency in comments made to Postmedia.

On the same day as the injunction, Justice Minister Kaycee Madu announced the province would be cracking down on repeat offenders by better coordinating the responses of multiple government agencies.

— *With files from Lauren Boothby*

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